Using The Internet In Your Home Business

Reasons To Go Online

By Kevin M. Savetz

Maybe you think your home-based business doesn't need the Internet—and maybe you're right. But don't dismiss the idea just because your business is gardening, or pet-sitting, or catering, or something equally non-technical. In this article, Kevin Savetz offers some reasons to reconsider that decision not to go online.

A few weeks ago, I was waiting for a friend to finish his training session at a martial arts studio. As I watched the students practice their movements, I heard from the back office the familiar sound of a modem making a connection. The proprietor of the business was connecting to the Internet. But, for what? What use could a martial arts studio—a place that teaches people to harness their power as humans—have for harnessing the power of the Internet? For a moment, the two elements seemed worlds apart.

The truth is, there are dozens of reasons for any business—including a home-based operation—to access the Internet. Your business doesn't need to be in a technology field; if you think that your business is too far entrenched in the "real world" to get something useful from Internet access, you may be surprised to find out the ways that businesses like yours are using the Net.

With that in mind, here are some ideas of ways you can utilize the Net in your business.

Desktop Publishing Resources

Do you publish a newsletter, flyers or create your own advertising? The Internet is full of archives of clip art and fonts that you can download and use to spice up your publications.

For instance, ArtToday (*http://www.arttoday.com*) offers more than 500,000 pieces of clip art—from stock photographs to line art. Easy to search, ArtToday makes it simple to find the perfect art. Unlimited access to graphics from ArtToday costs $9.95/month.

Likewise, the Internet is home to many font archives. You can buy professional-quality fonts from companies like Bitstream (*http://www.bitstream.com*) and have them delivered to your computer and ready to use in a matter of minutes. Free fonts abound, too, from sources such as Fontaholics Anonymous (*http://home1.gte.net/tiaralyn/Fotaholics_Anonymous.htm*).

Electronic Mail

It's easy to overlook electronic mail, but email is an Internet tool that has revolutionized the way businesses communicate.

You may be inclined to brush off email as a tool that doesn't fit into your business, but many businesses have found that this tool can be an integral part of communications. If not between you and your customers, then between employees who work in other locations.

Electronic mail can often convey more detail more clearly than a voice-mail message. Because it allows you to read and answer messages on your terms, email reduces the number of times you end up "playing phone tag" with others.

Research

If your businesses takes you to the library for research, the Internet may be able to help you do the job from your desk. For example, Britannica Online is the online version of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (*http://www.eb.com*), available by monthly ($12.50) or annual ($150) subscription. And the Electric Library offers a database of 1.5 million newspaper articles and 300,000 magazine articles (*http://www.elibrary.com*).

The Perry-Castaneda Map Collection holds more than 2,100 public domain maps covering every area of the world (*http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html*). Another useful research tool is Switchboard (*http://www.switchboard.com*), a humongous online phone book replete with the names, phone numbers and addresses of millions of individuals and businesses across the US.

Computer Support

If you already use a computer for your business, the Internet can help you make better use of it. If your accounting software or word processor isn't working like it should, you can use the Internet to get help from that company's Web site, or send an electronic mail message to their support team for assistance. This can be quicker—and a whole lot less frustrating—than making a long-distance phone call then waiting on hold for hours for technical support.

Many computer companies make their software updates available on the Internet—often for free. So if you need to upgrade your copy of QuickBooks or Microsoft Word to the latest version, all it takes is a trip to that company's Web

Above: The online version of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* offers all that the hardbound original does for $12.50 per month.

site in order to download the upgrade. Hardware manufacturers, too, make upgrades available on the Internet, from printer drivers to "flash-ROM" modem upgrades.

Sites such as *www.versiontracker.com* and *www.versionmaster.com* take the effort out of finding out if your software is up-to-date: The Internet can help make the software your business already uses work better.

Get Government Information

The Small Business Administration is no stranger to many businesses, and this is just one government agency that provides wholly useful information on the Internet. Its Web site (*http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov*) offers an online workshop on developing a business plan, and information on starting, financing, and expanding your business.

If your business involves creating something—whether it's watches, wall art or widgets—two more government Internet sites can be invaluable to you. The US Copyright Office (*http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/*) and the US Patent & Trademark Office (*http:// www.uspto.gov*) serve up just about everything you'll need to know about using legal means to hold on to the work that you have created.

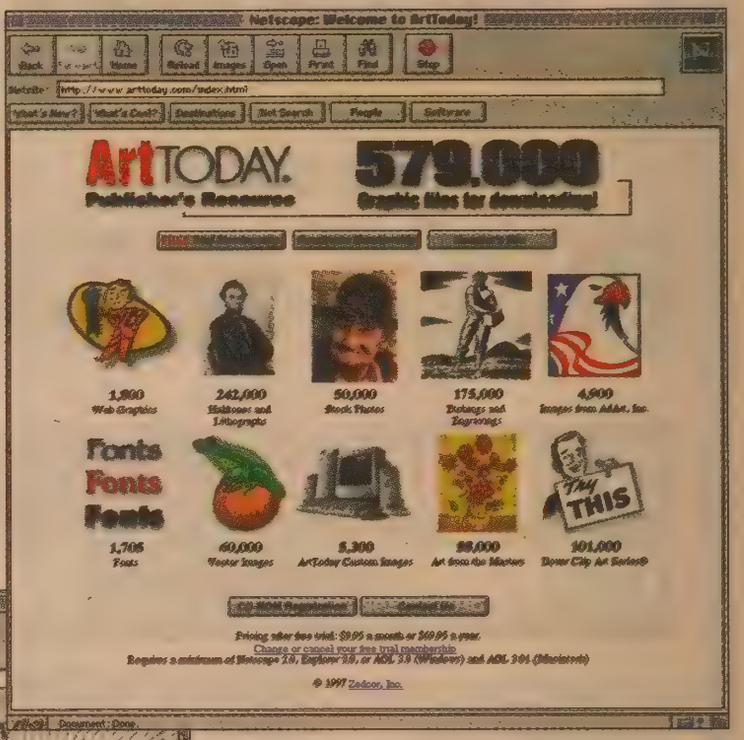
The Better Business Bureau also has a Web page, where you can get answers to common questions about the BBB, access consumer buying guides and business publications, and even file a complaint against a business that has done you wrong (*http://www.bbb.org*).

Set Up A Web Site

Your business can have a Web site of its own, of course. If created well and properly promoted, a Web site can build name recognition for your company and bolster business. For some businesses, even ones that have nothing to do with computers, having a Web page is becoming as desirable as having an ad in the Yellow Pages.

Online advertisements are easier to change than print ads. Some businesses are experimenting with letting Internet users print out coupons, which saves paper vs. mailing out reams of flyers.

Find a reputable local company that can create and host your company's Web site. You can do it yourself (if you have the time), but the benefits of having a knowledgeable "Webmaster" set up your site far outweigh the monetary cost. The trick is to make the site useful—not just an online ad—and then find a way to ensure that Internet users in your geographic area will know about the site.



The Perry-Castaneda Map Collection Web site (left) provides more than 2,000 public-domain maps from all over the world, while the ArtToday Web site (right) delivers over 500,000 pieces of clip art for $9.95/month.

Check Up On Your Competition

Not to sound callous, but if your competition has a Web site, you can use the Internet to see what they're up to: Read the press releases that they post and find out what they are charging for their products.

In the same vein, you can use the Internet to see what your customers are saying about you. If your company sells products that are used around the nation or world, chances are good that Internet users occasionally talk about your product. For instance, you can use a search tool like *www.reference.com* to find out if folks have mentioned your company in newsgroups. You may do your company some good by finding out what people are complaining about and using that information to smooth your customers' ruffled feathers.

Small Business Support

The Net is home to plenty of resources for owners of small businesses and home offices. For instance, the Small & Home-Based Business Links site offers annotated links to Internet sites focused on home-based franchises, business opportunities, reference material, marketing, and services for small business (*http://*

The Small Business Journal's Web site has a "corpulent archive of back issues" available to small entrepreneurs hoping to grow their businesses.

www.ro.com/small_business/homebased.html). And The Idea Cafe offers scores of articles, interviews and information for small business owners. Idea Cafe's mission is to help entrepreneurs succeed in reaching their business and personal goals (*http://www.ideacafe.com*).

The Small Business Journal is a print magazine "dedicated to the growing business." Its Web site, *www.tsbj.com*, offers a corpulent archive of back issues, with articles that will help you learn what you customers really think of you and how to eliminate your fear of the IRS.

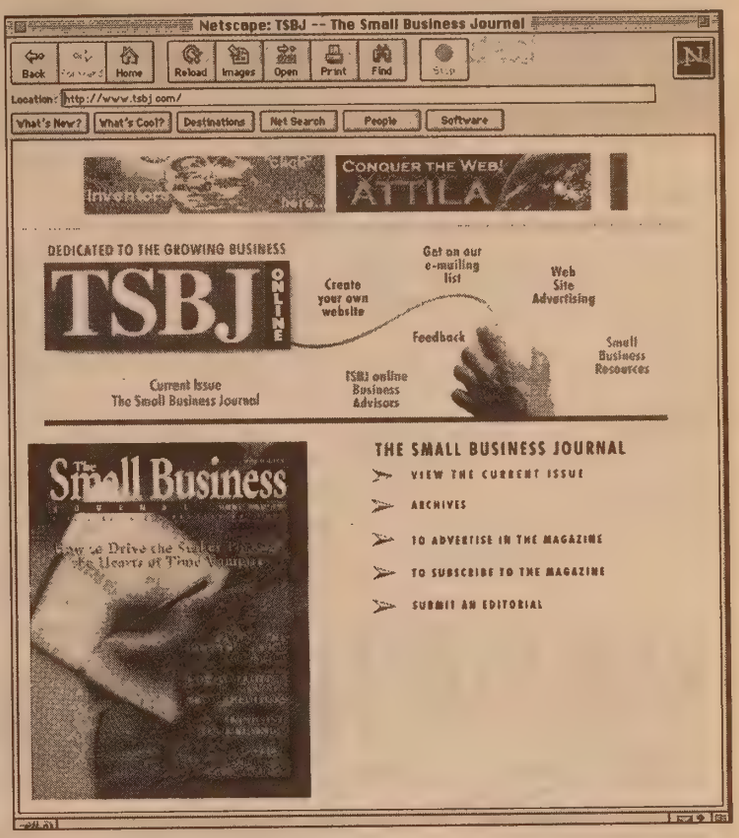
Faxing

Maybe you need to send an occasional fax, but not frequently enough to warrant investing in a fax machine. Or, perhaps you want to send broadcast faxes to your clients—more volume than your little fax machine can handle. Either way, you can use an Internet fax server to send high-quality faxes domestically or abroad. Many fax services offer excellent rates for long-distance faxes, and others are absolutely free (although the free fax services have limited coverage areas).

Other services specialize in sending bulk faxes, and still others can receive faxes for you and deliver the fax to you via electronic mail. For more information about Internet fax services, read the document "How Can I Send a Fax from the Internet?" at *www.northcoast.com/savetz/fax-faq.html*.

Distributing Press Releases

Rather than let your company's latest news go unnoticed, you can use the Internet to get attention. A gaggle of public relations firms have set up shop on the Net. These companies can write press releases and distribute them—online as well as by traditional means.



PENTIUM 166 MHz Multimedia SYSTEM
w/14" SVGA Monitor/16 MB/1.3GB 12X CD-ROM/16-Bit Sound Card/1.44MB FDD/33.6K Fax/KB/Spkrs
$799

1.3GB Hard Drive
$130

Mini Tower Case
$23

P5 Motherboard 256K & Intel P5-166 CPU
$199

4 MB PCI S3 Virge SVGA Card
$46

Yamaha 16-Bit Sound Card
$15

VIDEO CARDS
OEM
1MB PCI S3 V64+ $25
1MB ISA ET4000 20
1MB VLB CL5429 20
4MB PCI S3 Virge 46
DIAMOND
Stealth 3000 4MB VRAM 139
Monster 3D 4MB VRAM 125
Fire GL1000 *MB SGRAM 266
MATROX
Millennium 4MB 170
Millennium II 4MB 199
Millennium II 8MB 298

SOUND CARDS
OEM
Opti/ESS/Yamaha Chipset
16-Bit $15
SOUNDBLASTER
16-Bit PnP 45
16-Bit PnP w/IDE 64
AWE32 WAVE PnP 73
AWE 64 98
WAVE64 GOLD w/4MB 180

MULTIMEDIA SYSTEM w/MONITOR & FAX/MODEM: (also Includes Sound Card, 1.44 MB FDD, 104 Keyboard, Mouse, Speakers)

PRICE	SYSTEM	Model/CPU	RAM	HDD	CD-ROM	MODEM	MONITOR	VIDEO CARD
$499	Beginner/Station	5X86/133	8 MB	420 MB	12X	14.4 K	14" Used	1 MB
799	Home/Student	P5/166	16 MB	1.3 GB	12X	14.4K	14" SVGA	1 MB
999	H/S Office/Engineer	P5/200 MMX	32 MB	2 GB	16X	33.6K	14" SVGA	2 MB
1349	H/S Office/Engineer	P5/233 MMX	32 MB	3GB	24X	56K	15" SVGA	4 MB
1599	Power Server	PRO/200	32 MB	6 GB	16X	33.6K	14" SVGA	1 MB
2499	Super Graphic	PII/266	64MB	4 GB	16X	33.6 K	17" SVGA	4 MB

CPU's & MEMORY
Intel CPU
Pentium ..... CALL
Pentium II ..... CALL
Pentium Pro ..... CALL
AMD CPU
K5 ..... CALL
K6 ..... CALL
CYRIX
486 DX2/66 ..... $25
486 DX4/100 27
6x86 ..... CALL

RAM
1MB/30-Pin $5
4MB/30-Pin 28
8MB/72-Pin ..... CALL
16MB/72-Pin ..... CALL
32MB/72-Pin ..... CALL

MOTHERBOARDS
FIC
486 VLB/128K/3-VLB up to DX4/120 ..... $35

FIC MOTHERBOARDS (cont)
Pentium/256K/4-PCI/3-ISA VIA Chipset, up to 200MHz .. $59
ARIST
Pentium 256K/512K Intel Chipset/3-PCI/3-ISA .66/69
Pentium Pro EIDE-IO, up to 200MHz 99
ADSI
Pentium 512K/Jumperless Intel Chipset/3-PCI/3-ISA ... $85

ASUS
TX/VX 97 Pentium, 512K up to 200MHz $145/99
TYAN
F1684 Pentium II, up to 300MHz/ATX 240
INTEL
Providence Dual Pentium Pro SCSI/LAN/Audio 2MB VRAM/ATX 619

HARD DRIVES
JST
1.3GB $130
2.1GB 155
3.1GB 20
WESTERN DIGITAL
2.5GB 199
3.1GB 215
4.0GB 2269
SEAGATE
4.3GB Ultra SCSI, 8ms 999
6.4GB 450
IOEMGA ZIP DRIVES
100MB SCSI $132
TAPE BACKUP
Colorado 3.2GB $245
SEAGATE 3.2GB 185
CD-WRITER
SONY 2x6 SCSI 451
CD-ROM
6X 50
12X 55
16X 65
20X 70
24X 90
1.44MB FDD 20

FOR-U-COMPUTER, INC.
(Next to 101, 880 & 680 Off Berryesa)
765 MABURY RD, San Jose, Ca 95133, Fax (408) 437-8719
TEL: (408) 437-8718
Open Mon-Friday 9am-6:30pm Sat & Sun 1pm-5pm

VISA
MasterCard

880 | N
13th | Oakland
101 | S | Mabury

The Right Price
The Right Advice

TOSHIBA

TECRA
510CDT P/133 16/2GB, 10X CD, 28.8, TFT $3450
730X CDT P/150, 16/2.1GB, 10X CD $4695
740 CDT P/166, 16/2.1GB, 10X CD $5695
740 CDT/3G P/166 MMX, 10X CD $6449
740 CDT/3NT P/166 MMX, 10X CD $6695

SATELLITE
220CDS P/133, 16/1.4GB, TFT, 10X CD-ROM.....$1995

SATELLITE PRO
440CDT P/133MMX 16/1.4GB, TFT, 10X CD-ROM ..$3495
440CDX P/133MMX 16/1.4GB, DS, 10X CD-ROM ..$2495

PORTEGE ULTRA
660CT P/150 16/1.3GB, 10X CD, 28.8 TFT .....CALL
All Toshiba Upgrades & Accessories Available.

IBM®

760 SERIES
760E P/150, 16/2.1GB $4375

365 SERIES
TP 365XD P/133, 8/1.35/CD TFT.....$2619
TP 365XD P/133, 8/1.3GB/CD.....$1929

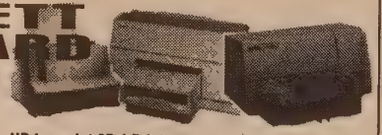
560 SERIES
TP 560 P/133, 8/2GB TFT $3769
TP 560 P/150MMX, 16/2GB, DS.....$2795
TP 560 P/166MMX, 16/2GB TFT.....$4395

COMPAQ

LTE SERIES
5300 P/133 16/1.3, 12" SVGA TFT .....CALL
5400 P/150, 32/2.1GB 12.1" SVGA TFT.....CALL

ARMADA SERIES
7710MT, P/150MMX, 16/1.6GB, TFT, NT $4295
7730MT, P/166MMX, 16/2.1GB, TFT, 95, NT $4895
7750MT, P/166MMX, 32/2.1GB, TFT, 95 NT $5695
1550DMT, P/133, 16/1.4GB, TFT, 10X CD, 33.6 Modem..$3495

hp HEWLETT PACKARD
Authorized Reseller



HP DeskJet 670C Printer $199
•Great performance at a low price
•1 color cartridge included
HP DeskJet 820CXi/870CXi Printer $379/479
•Fast performance delivers increased productivity
•Accepts a wider range of media for a variety of output needs
•Plug'n'Play installation for both PC and Mac
HP DeskJet 692C Printer $319
•600 dpi resolution
•3-year warranty offers the longest protection in the industry
HP LaserJet 6Lxi Printer $399
•4 ppm, 24MHz Motorola 68030 processor
•4,000 Monthly duty cycle
HP LaserJet 5/5M Printer $1095/1549
•600 dpi resolution
•3-year warranty offers the longest protection in the industry
HP LaserJet 6Pxi Printer $759
•600 dpi resolution
•Plug and play for PC
HP LaserJet 5N, Network Ready Printer $1349
•Plug'n'Play installation and hands-off operation in virtually any network environment
•Fast, high volume performance for increased productivity
HP LaserJet 4V/4MV Printer $1795/2539
•33MHz RISC processor delivers fast printing of complex pages and graphics
•5"x 7" to 11"x17" tabloid size media support with full-bleed capability
HP LaserJet 5Si/5SiMX Printer $2359/3419
•24 ppm print speed and 100,000-page monthly duty cycle
•Increased user controls and improved network management

apple

NEW APPLE SYSTEMS ARE AVAILABLE NOW:
PowerMac 8600/200 16/2GB/CD .....CALL
PowerMac 9600/200 32/2GB/CD .....CALL
Performa 6400 P/180 16/1.2GB/8X CD .....CALL
Performa 6400 P/200 16/2.4GB/8X CD .....CALL

COMPAQ

DeskPro 2000 Series .....CALL
DeskPro 4000 Series .....CALL
DeskPro 6000 Series .....CALL
SERVERS
Proliant 2500 Pentium® Pro Series.....CALL
Proliant 5000 Pentium® Pro Series.....CALL
Proliant 6000 Pentium® Pro Series.....CALL

NETWORKING
3COM Routers .....CALL
Cisco Routers .....CALL
Motorola DSU/CSU .....CALL
Call for Custom Configuration and Complete Solutions

Authorized Service Center for HP, Compaq, & Toshiba

Since 1992!

AA TECHNOLOGY, INC.

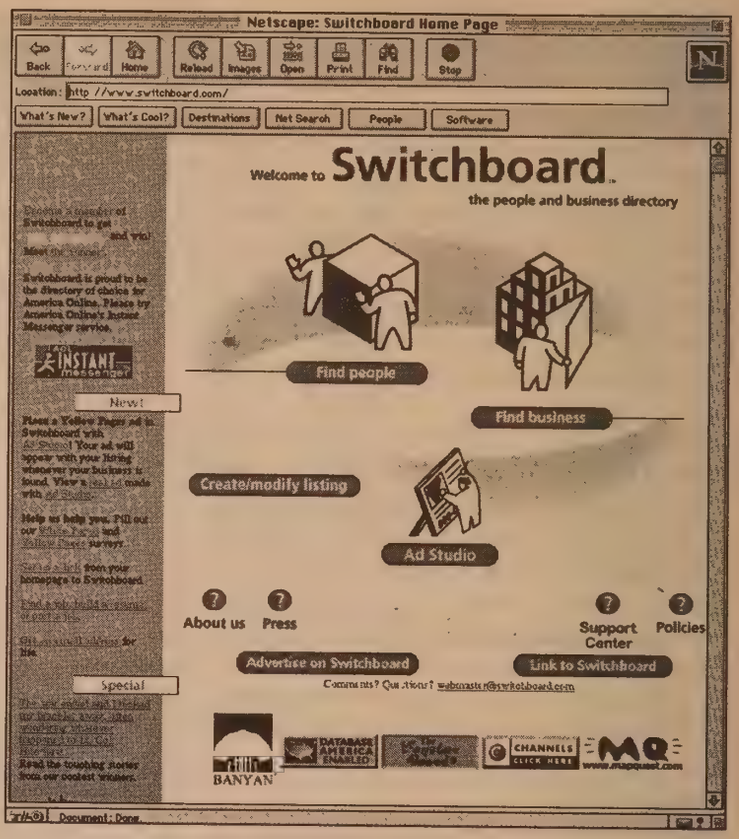
FREMONT
510.226.8650
Fax 510.226.8652
45277 Fremont Blvd. #11
Fremont, CA 94538

SAN FRANCISCO
415.782.0000
Fax 415.782.0011
350 Sansome Street, Suite #M10
San Francisco, CA 94104

apple HEWLETT PACKARD OKIDATA COMPAQ TOSHIBA EPSON

Prices reflect cash discount.
Prices & availability subject to change without notice.
Not responsible for typographical errors. All logos are registered trademarks of their respective companies.

The Switchboard Web site is a searchable "phone book" containing millions of names, phone numbers and addresses from across the US.



Personnel

The Internet's many job placement sites can make any open position get noticed. Online job placement agencies can mean you'll get more qualified applicants from a wider area than a "help wanted" ad in the local newspaper could draw.

For instance, CareerSite (*http://www.careersite.com*) matches workers with prospective jobs that suit them based on occupation, industry, location, education and skills. The service also provides a messaging service applicants can use to contact you.

The Monster Board (*http://beast.monster.com*) offers some 50,000-plus listings, arranged in "communities" of information for entrepreneurs, franchisees, healthcare professionals, CEOs and executives, entry-level jobs and so on.

Classified Ads

If you need to unload an old deep fryer, truck, or that Asteroids game that's been haunting the storage room since time immemorial, chances are good you can find a buyer with the help of Yahoo! Classifieds (*http://classifieds.yahoo.com*) or another of the Net's fine classified advertisement troves.

Conversely, if your business is in need of equipment but you can't afford to buy it new, you can bet that someone, somewhere on the Net has one they're dying to unload.

You may not need Internet access for your business—certainly countless businesses have survived without it. But using the Internet can help you communicate more effectively, solve the little problems that crop up, find more customers and hire great employees. The Internet is a versatile tool, and with some creativity, you can use it to make your business a little bit better, no matter what you do. ■

Copyright © 1997 by Kevin M. Savetz. All rights reserved.